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AUTHOR Miller, Geraldine A.; Russo, Thomas J.
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ABSTRACT

Although much of traditional psychology assumes that a spiritual orientation is largely a matter of choice, it is contended here that such choices are embedded in the rich fabric of the cultural framework. This study explores a quantitative and qualitative contrast between Caucasian and Native American alcoholics on dimensions of spiritual development. Fifty self-reported, Caucasian alcoholics, and 37 self-reported Native American alcoholics and non-alcoholics, were administered the Spiritual Well-Being Scale. Additionally, two separate focus group interviews were conducted with selected samples of Native American and Caucasian alcoholics. Quantitative results showed no significant differences between the two groups in terms of spiritual, religious, and/or existential well-being. However, the focus groups revealed some potentially important thematic differences between the culturally diverse groups. Important cultural themes, which integrate spirituality and recovery from alcoholism, are outlined. The study identified two limitations in conducting research on alcoholism and spirituality among culturally diverse groups: the difficulty in obtaining large sample sizes, and the large standard deviations for both groups, suggesting the heterogeneity of spiritual development of recovering alcoholics. Implications for further qualitative inquiry and psychotherapeutic practice are made. (RJM)

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Spiritual Well-Being and Alcoholism: A Cross-Cultural View

Geraldine A. Miller

College of Education

Appalachian State University

Thomas J. Russo

College of Education

University of Wisconsin - River Falls

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Running Head: ALCOHOLISM AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

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Geraldine A. Miller
Room 201-H, Department of Human Development and Psychological Counseling
Edwin Duncan Hall, Appalachian State University
Boone, NC 28608

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Abstract

This study explores a quantitative and qualitative contrast between Caucasian and Native American alcoholics on dimensions of spiritual development. Using the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Ellison, 1983; Paloutzian & Ellison, 1992), no significant differences were found between the two groups in terms of spiritual, religious, and/or existential well-being. However, when a focus group approach was used, potentially important thematic differences were found between the culturally diverse groups. The important and different cultural themes integrating spirituality and recovery from alcoholism are outlined. Implications for further qualitative inquiry and psychotherapeutic practice are made.

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There is a growing acceptance of religious and spiritual matters in the practice of counseling and psychotherapy (Albany, 1984; Bergin, 1988; Conway, 1989; Farra, Gitchett, Quinberg-Embler, & Buck, 1989; Houts & Graham, 1986; Miller, 1992; Russo, 1984). Although an individual's overall sense of well-being is partially comprised of his spiritual and transpersonal perspective, much of traditional psychology and psychotherapy assumes that a spiritual orientation is largely a matter of choice-making (Boy & Pine, 1990; Causey, 1987; Chapin, 1989; Klenow & Bolin, 1990; Richards, Smith, & Davis, 1989; Spilka, 1986). We contend that such choice-making is embedded in the rich fabric of the cultural framework.

In a previous study, Miller and Russo (1991) surveyed two groups of mostly Caucasian, self-reported alcoholics (50) and non-alcoholics (58) using the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Ellison, 1983; Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982). This quantitative measure was followed up with a focus group interview, which discussed spiritual development in recovery of selected self-reported alcoholics. The non-alcoholics scored

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significantly higher on the Spiritual Well-Being scale than did the alcoholics. Further, the focus group indicated a theme of specific spiritual development path which the alcoholics chose to follow. The present study attempted to (a) better understand, from a cross-cultural perspective, the spiritual paths of recovering alcoholics by studying Native American self-reported alcoholics, and (b) explore the cultural underpinnings of Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWB) and its theoretical base, Stages of Faith (Fowler, 1981).

Ellison (1983; Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982) developed the SWB scale as part of a large study concerned with overall life satisfaction. The SWB includes both a religious dimension (RWB) and an existential dimension (EWB). Since its initial use, the SWB has been used to study married couples (Roth, 1988), nursing students (Carson, Soeken, & Grimm, 1988), caregivers of terminally ill family members (Kirschling & Pittman, 1989), and recovering alcoholics (Miller & Russo, 1991).

The SWB is a well-established scale. The SWB is reported as having "... test-retest reliability

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coefficients of .93 (SWB), .96 (RWB), and .86 (EWB). Alpha coefficients reflecting internal consistency were .89 (SWB), .87 (RWB), and .78 (EWB)" (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982, p. 233). In follow-up studies, Ellison (1983) found spiritual well-being was positively correlated with measures of self-esteem, family cohesiveness, and positive view towards parents. Negative correlations with the scale were found with high personal values of success and independence. However, in the search for general description and basic commonalities, the SWB, as most nomothetic devices, loses important connotative distinctions.

In terms of underlying assumptions of the SWB scale, Ellison (1983) acknowledges linear, hierarchial assumptions: having, relating, being, and transcending. A person develops a heightened sense of individuality through the following stages: material and economic well-being (having), social interactions (relating), focusing on existential quality (being) and moving beyond individual selfhood (transcending). Here, as elsewhere in traditional models of personality and

psychotherapy, individual selfhood is a necessary condition for spiritual development.

Both the SWB and Fowler's Stages of Faith (1981) are stage approaches and therefore hierarchically constructed notions of spiritual development. Fowler's (1981) model is derived from Erickson's (1950) stage model of psychosocial development. Fowler (1981) suggests that the individual moves through the following stages: Intuitive-Protective (early childhood), Mythic-Literal (school years), Synthetic-Conventional (adolescence), Conjunctive (mid-life), and Universalizing Faith (post mid-life).

Based on qualitative interviews, Fowler constructed a cumulative, sequential model in which individuals "acquire" spiritual transcendence largely through rational, cognitive individual effort. Once again, the cultural framework in which spiritual and religious development occurs is missing.

While both Ellison (1983) and Fowler (1981) have contributed substantially to the understanding of spiritual development and its use in psychotherapy, the

lack of a culturally sensitive perspective results in several critical questions:

(1) When individual concerns dominate the description of spirituality, do potentially rich cultural descriptions suffer?

(2) How might observations be made that would ensure better incorporation of cultural concerns?

(3) What are the implications for furcher empirical and psychotherapeutic explorations?

Method

Participants

Two culturally diverse groups of alcoholics and non-alcoholics were administered the SWB. Group One was comprised of 21 male and 29 female, self-reported, Caucasian alcoholics. Ages ranged from 21 to 61 years, with a mean of 37.37 and a standard deviation of 8.91. Group Two consisted of 12 male and 25 female, self-reported Native American alcoholics and non-alcoholics. Ages in this second group ranged from 18 to 45 with a mean of 29.62 and a standard deviation of 7.92.

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Measures

Quantitative. The SWB scale was used as a general measure of spiritual development. Paloutzian & Ellison (1982) have demonstrated acceptable levels of reliability with test-retest coefficients of .93 (SWB), .96 (RWB), and .86 (EWB), and alpha coefficients (internal consistency) of .89 (SWB), .87 (RWB), and .78 (EWB). In terms of validity, there have been high correlations with self-esteem measures, family cohesiveness, positive view towards one's parents, and negative correlations with an individualistic perspective, i.e. personal success and independence (Ellison, 1983). The SWB Scale was administered to students in college classroom settings.

Qualitative. Two separate focus group interviews were conducted with selected samples of Native American and Caucasian alcoholics. The focus groups utilized an open-ended group format. The intention of the focus groups was to explore the relationship between cultural concerns and spiritual development. Focus group content was examined for culturally-based themes.

In each of the two focus group interviews,

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participants were asked to discuss: (a) their spiritual development during their period of recovery from alcoholism, and (b) their means of accessing their conception of god. Beyond this general opening instruction, only clarifying questions were posed only when necessary to group participation. Each group session lasted approximately 90 minutes.

Results

Quantitative Analysis

A one-tailed t-test for independent samples was used. The mean SWB score for Group One (50 Caucasians) was 92.84 with a standard deviation of 16.60. The mean SWB score for Group Two (37 Native Americans) was 97.03 with a standard deviation of 13.44. Using $p<.05$, there were no significant differences in overall SWB scores between the two groups (t-value = -1.27, probability = .1024).

Insert Table 1 about here

Qualitative Analysis

Analysis of the content of the focus group interviews revealed several themes. The spiritual development themes of Group One (Caucasians) were in a linear, time-sequenced, hierarchical order. Following are Group One themes regarding the stages of their spiritual beliefs in recovery.

1. Admission of a personal failure (0-2 years' sobriety)

   "Life is a colossal flop."

2. Personalization of God (2-5 years' sobriety)

   "I had to redefine God."

3. Stabilization of spiritual beliefs (7-8 years' sobriety)

   "Around 6 or 7 years of sobriety I returned to organized religion."

The themes of Group Two (Native Americans) tended to be circular, timeless, and interconnected:

1. Self

   "...closer to the creator, closer to who I am."

2. Others

   "We are all brothers and sisters."

3. Life

"[Things happen] when everyone gets there, when it is time for them to happen. No purpose in making plans -- why stuff life?"

Insert Figure 1 about here

Figure 1 illustrates the spiritual development themes acknowledged by the Caucasian and Native American groups.

Discussion

Limitations

There were limitations with replicating the procedures. Issues of language and cultural sensitivity are necessary concerns in this type of research. Since this study addresses spirituality in a cultural context, it is important to discuss the cultural limitations of the study/research.

Quantitative. Both groups had subjects who were high school graduates and current college undergraduates, but only the Caucasian group had college graduate students. Both groups were accessed in college

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classrooms with three distinctions: (a) the Caucasian classrooms were larger (30-40 people compared to 2-8 Native Americans in the tribal college classroom), (b) unlike the Caucasian college classroom, there was no formal introduction of the researcher in the Native American classroom ("Just go in and ask them [if they will participate]"), and (c) the SWB forms were more frequently lost or forgotten by the Native American tribal college professors and students resulting in a smaller sample.

Qualitative. Between-group differences were noted in the structure of the focus group and in responses to the opening questions. The Caucasians responded well to a structured beginning time, ending time, and specific location for the focus group. However, the Native Americans' focus group did not meet until it was spontaneously "time for it to happen". Also, the Caucasians allowed the focus group to be audio-taped and the researcher to take notes, while the Native Americans stated they did not want audiotaping or note-taking. While both the Caucasians and Native Americans spoke one at a time, there were communication style

differences. The Caucasians announced when they were done speaking and did not speak again until everyone had a chance to speak. The Native Americans gradually slowed their speech until they stopped speaking and they spoke at length on their views even though others had not yet spoken. Unlike the Caucasians, the Native Americans insisted that the researcher's spiritual views be expressed in the interview.

When responding to the posed questions ("What was your spiritual development in recovery?" "How do you access your god?"), the Native Americans answered broadly about spirituality, while the Caucasians answered each question specifically. The Caucasians answered clarifying questions by the researcher at length while the Native Americans gave brief responses.

Need for Quantitative and Qualitative Elements

This study helped identify two main limitations in conducting research on alcoholism and spirituality among culturally diverse groups. First, it is difficult to obtain large sample sizes of recovering alcoholics for both race and stage of recovery. The resultant small sample sizes decrease the chance of

identifying statistically significant cultural differences. Second, the large standard deviations for both groups suggest that the spiritual development of recovering alcoholics may be very heterogeneous. This heterogeneity further complicates study of this group due to the idiosyncratic spiritual views of alcoholics.

The usefulness of the SWB Scale may be limited to those groups who share a common set of cultural assumptions. For example, one Western view of religious development is reflected in beliefs in: the power of choice given to the individual; a sequential, hierarchial view of development; a minimization of cultural differences at higher stages of development (Fowler, 1981). The absence of any significant quantitative difference between the two culturally diverse groups in this study may mask deeper differences in spiritual/religious development structures.

The problems in replicating research methods between cultural contexts, the inherent limitations in the research of alcoholism recovery, and the culturally bound nature of quantitative instruments, call for the

inclusion of qualitative research techniques. The voice of the individual within the context of his/her culture can only be accessed through qualitative research methods such as the focus group interview. The qualitative method can "unearth" varying emphases on spirituality (i.e. time frame, non-linear view of spiritual development) promoted by the culture of the individual.

Recommendations

Further research using and exploring cultural differences in the spiritual development of recovering alcoholics is recommended. This research should employ both quantitative and qualitative methods. Further, more specific, descriptive research needs to be done to explore and identify racial differences in spiritual development.

In the area of counseling, clinicians must be aware of sequential, hierarchial views of spiritual development embedded in Western psychological thinking. While scales such as the SWB may be used in counseling as discussion tools, they must also be viewed as potentially culturally-bound instruments. The clarity

in spiritual differences between individuals lies not in their scores on measures of spiritual development, but in the individual's perception and description of spiritual views.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and T-tests

	Group	
	Caucasian Alcoholics (n=50)	Native American Alcoholics (n=37)
Spiritual Well-Being Scale		
M	92.84	97.03
SD	16.60	13.44

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Contrasts of Spiritual Development.

DEVELOPMENTAL "STEPS" ON "PATHWAY" TO SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

		STABILIZATION OF SPIRITUAL BELIEFS
	PERSONALIZATION OF GOD (HIGHER POWER)	PERSONALIZATION OF GOD (HIGHER POWER)
ADMISSION OF PERSONAL FAILURE BY THE ALCOHOLIC	ADMISSION OF PERSONAL FAILURE BY THE ALCOHOLIC	ADMISSION OF PERSONAL FAILURE BY THE ALCOHOLIC

NATIVE AMERICAN SPIRITUAL WELL -BEING